

THE CATHEDRAL OF FAITH

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HE YOUNG SEMINARIAN lays his theology text on the desk. His mind is crowded with wonderful ideas, ideas about God and about the great edifice of Theology—that magnificent structure fashioned under the omnipotent hand of God and the created hands of men. And one thought, one question persistently plagues him, “How has the science of Theology become such a glorious monument of truth?”

A few centuries ago this same problem must have weighed heavily on the mind of a young Spanish student of Theology. That youth was Melchior Cano. He too was astonished at the fabulous amount of knowledge that had been compressed into his Theology text. His youthful mind was struck with such erudition and he realized that the wisdom of the ages was at his finger tips. As a result, similar questions arose in his mind, “How has theology become such a glorious monument of truth? Who built it? What materials went into its making?” Surely it must have been thoughts such as these that inspired him to leave a great theological work to the Catholic Church, his *De Locis Theologicis*.

In resolving these questions in his own mind he unveiled the beauty and grandeur intrinsic to the science of Theology and, lest the fruits of his contemplation fade into oblivion, he wrote his thoughts down so that all might benefit from them. These thoughts contained in his *De Locis Theologicis* are the blueprints for the construction of this Cathedral of Faith.

Before beginning actual construction of an edifice, however simple in design, there must be a levelling off of all obstructions which might hinder the laying of the foundation. Here we will use Cano's preliminary remarks in order to establish a common ground upon which to proceed.

Having paid tribute to his predecessors in the field of Theology, Cano mentions two fundamental sources from which all sciences proceed; reason and authority. He then emphasizes the order in which they are to be approached. In most sciences reason rules supreme while authority is just a bolstering element. In the case of Theology, authority holds supreme dominion, reason being nothing more than

an aid for a fuller understanding of things revealed. The authority of God through His Holy Church is the most powerful of all authorities both for the theologian and the faithful since it endows us with absolute certitude. Nevertheless, reason also must play its role in assisting man to a fuller and better understanding of sacred truths and mysteries. While reason is a feeble instrument in penetrating things divine, it does lead a man to these truths in a more intelligible fashion and hence a more human fashion. It has often been objected that reason was an innovation on the part of the Apostolic Fathers or of the medieval scholastics. This is simply not true. Christ, the Supreme Teacher, led mankind to the understanding of the supernatural through the natural; principally through His miracles and parables.

Cano now reveals the nature of his theological places. They are fonts from which theologians take their arguments to refute religious errors or to bolster religious truths. He was by no means the first to draw from these fonts but he was a pioneer in arranging the truths of theology and showing the role each has to perform. Briefly he explains the contribution which each font makes in the development and erection of this resplendent temple of Theology. From this point on the actual raising of the Cathedral of Faith will be accomplished.

Of immediate necessity is the essential and fundamental element, the foundation. For Melchior Cano the foundation of Theology is revelation and tradition. These are the firm rocks which were first given to the Apostles by Christ, then passed on to the Church to guard and build upon.

Revelation is the sacred word of God and hence ranks first in the field of Theology. It is the very heart and core of Theology. Throughout the many centuries of the existence of Holy Mother the Church, Sacred Scripture has been abused by men who wish to inject their own opinion into the word of the Holy Ghost. Because of this, Catholics more and more turn to the Spouse of Christ and Her Scripture Scholars to interpret and clarify the passages of Holy Scripture. Everything contained in both the Old and the New Testaments has an infinite wealth of meaning and we rely on these experts to extract this meaning so that we may be able to live by the word of God more abundantly.

Tradition is the living voice of Christ echoed by His Apostles and His Church throughout the ages. Tradition is nearly as old as man himself. In the *Antiquities of the Jews* we read how Seth, knowing from tradition the words of Adam regarding the destruction of the world by water and fire, built two pillars upon which he wrote certain scientific discoveries so that they would not perish from the

earth. ¹Tradition in its true sense does not consist in facts written on tablets or skins but rather they are truths written in the hearts of men. St. John bears witness to the importance of tradition in the last verse of his gospel story; "But there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written every one, the world itself, I think would not be able to contain the books that should be written."²

The problem which now presents itself is the raising of the super-structure, the shell which is destined to give the basic form. This shell we may very aptly term the Catholic Church in Her teaching authority. The Church is to be considered as the society which is exclusively united in the faith and calling of Christ whether its members are in the state of grace or sin. Since it is the ordinary custodian of divine truth the Church really includes the next two theological fonts, the Roman Pontiff and the Councils of the Church, for the power of both spring from the divinely founded Church of Christ.

Having completed the super-structure we must turn to the task of preparing a sanctuary where the sacred liturgy may be performed with proper solemnity. Like all great Churches and Cathedrals this sanctuary must have choir stalls where the ministers of the Church may sing the praises of God. These stalls constitute the fourth font, the Councils of the Church. Each time a new Council is convened another voice is added to those already chanting in the Court of the Lord. New voices have been added from time to time so that the truths of Christ might ring more clearly in the ears of the faithful. Because of the rise of disputes in theological matters the Church deemed it necessary to institute these councils so that the hierarchy and the theologians could discuss and settle them. The first Council, which was provoked by the controversy over the rite of circumcision, was presided over by St. Peter himself. Since then the voice of the various Councils has been resounding throughout the world and will continue to enunciate divine truths until the end of time.

For the completion of the sanctuary there only remains the high altar to which the priesthood of Christ must turn. This is the Roman Pontiff, the successor of St. Peter and the Vicar of the Supreme Mediator between God and man. Needless to say, the authority of the Pope offers to Theology infallible arguments in those matters which pertain to faith and morals. The Primacy of Peter and his lawful successors is derived from the authority which Christ bestowed

¹ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*. Translated by William Whiston. (Potter & Co., Philadelphia.) Book I; Chap. 2, p. 32.

² St. John, 21:25.

on the Chief of the Apostles. When Christ gave to Peter the keys of the kingdom, He also gave him the power to destroy all impediments which would hinder the use of those keys. These impediments are sin and ignorance of faith. For these Christ gave the Sacraments and the infallibility of Peter so that the faithful might advance to eternal happiness surely, courageously and without fear of error.

We must now furnish our cathedral with a pulpit in which the sacred word of God might be preached to the faithful. Melchior Cano anticipates this need and presents us with a magnificent and eloquent pulpit in his sixth font, the Fathers of the Church. The Fathers are those holy men who lived during the infancy of the Church and who are outstanding for their sound Catholic doctrine. There are eight major Fathers, four of the East; St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Athanasius, and St. Basil the Great, and four of the West; St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Gregory the Great, and St. Ambrose. When there is a question raised concerning a teaching which is common among the Fathers, their arguments can be taken as certain. However, since the Fathers did not profess to be anything other than theologians their teachings which are not in a theological vein have no more cogency than the reader wishes to give them. The Fathers should at all times be read with great respect and reverence because they lived very close to Apostolic times. With regard to the authority of an individual Father Cano makes a very apt observation "To despise is impudent, to accept as certain is imprudent."³

In order to complete the interior of this temple of God we must have pews upon which the faithful may rest. These pews are found in the doctors and theologians of the Church. The faithful depend on these learned men to guide them in interpreting Sacred Scripture, the directives of the Holy See and the teachings of the Fathers. Melchior Cano felt it a duty and a necessity to list these men in his treatise because of the excellence of their writings, their accomplishments in the field of theology and their skill in interpreting the articles of faith.

Now we must begin to embellish our cathedral in order to bring out as much of its beauty as possible. First there is the question of stained glass windows. These windows usher in a dim but adequate light enabling all to gaze upon the interior beauty of this mysterious and graceful temple of God. This is the eighth font, human reason. The light of reason is filtered through these windows of faith and aid all those who enter to see and understand divine truths. Theolo-

³ Cano, *De Locis Theologicis*; Lib. VI, Cap. III.

gians do not need to be convinced of the important role which reason plays in the realm of Theology. They could hardly begin to defend the doctrine of the Church to unbelievers were they not well armed with the irresistible powers of reason. Holy Mother the Church has seen the true value of this divinely endowed gift for she encourages her children to use it so that they may have a reason for the faith that is in them.

With the stained glass windows installed we now set about the task of putting the finishing touches to the contour of this cathedral. These finishing touches are the spires, bell tower and all the other external ornamentation. Melchior Cano now gives us his ninth font, the Philosophers. These are the men who wrestled with the powers of reason and who were able to bring to light many elementary truths which theologians may very aptly put to use. Despite the mistakes that even the greatest of Philosophers made in their quest for eternal truth, they also made many important discoveries and these properly belong to the Catholic Church, the guardian of all truth.

Cano now sets off his cathedral with the landscaping, making it now an edifice resplendent with beauty. The font which performs this duty is History. Theology, as all sciences, must dip its cup into the treasures of History for only History gives a bird's eye view of the two thousand years of the Church's existence. History stands ready to offer many contingent facts to the theologian which he otherwise could not surmise. However, in order to put credence in any Historian, he must be learned and prudent and a man who writes his History on fact and not on sentiment.

Thus we have the towering Cathedral of Theology as Melchior Cano suggests it. This is the magnificent edifice which was begun by Christ and which was constructed under His guiding hands. This is the bulwark of truth which has withstood the brunt of storms and years and will continue to brave all tempests in the future. But the Cathedral of Faith is not completed nor will it ever be completed, for the living Church of God will keep on building and adding with its teachings and dogmas until the end of time.

This sacred temple of faith was intended by God to captivate the hearts of all men who gaze upon its intellectual and aesthetic beauty. It is an instrument of Christ's mercy, an instrument drawing all men unto Himself.

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